

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Foolish to slash library support

Former Gov. Bruce Sundlun recommends eliminating "library payments" to help balance the state budget ("R.I. deficit," Commentary, Nov. 3). What a harsh blow this would deal to Rhode Islanders! Local support and the corresponding quality of library service would erode, just when people need libraries most.

In difficult times, people need libraries with long open hours, up-to-date materials and knowledgeable staff. The fact that state aid directly relates to municipal support is significant in making these possible.

Per Rhode Island General Law 29-6, as of 2000, state funding for libraries matches 25 percent of each community's allocation. Local funds in 2002 exceeded \$24 million but cost the state *only* \$6 per resident. Accordingly, public libraries have joined the Cooperating Libraries Automated Network (CLAN), hired staff, extended hours, offered access to electronic information and increased cooperation through the Oxford Libraries Information System (OLIS) interlibrary loan clearinghouse and delivery system. Even in this difficult year, the specter of losing state funding discouraged all Rhode Island municipalities from cutting their appropriations below last year's level.

To receive library aid, no municipality may appropriate less for its library than it did the preceding year; no library may provide less than the minimal level of service prescribed in state standards; and each library must share its resources across local boundaries - helping to equalize service for all Rhode Island residents, no matter where they live.

Eliminating library state aid to help balance the budget would be a 'pound-Foolish' action indeed. After all, libraries will get you through times with no money better than money will get you through times with no libraries.

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